

Prevent Child Abuse America
Chicago, Illinois

Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States

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Child abuse and neglect are preventable, yet each year in the United States, close to one million children are confirmed victims of child maltreatment. An extensive body of research provides promising and best practices on what works to improve child safety and well-being outcomes and reduce the occurrence of child abuse and neglect. These efforts are essential as child abuse and neglect have pervasive and long-lasting effects on children, their families, and the society. Adverse consequences for children's development often are evident immediately, encompassing multiple domains including physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. For many children, these effects extend far beyond childhood into adolescence and adulthood, potentially compromising the lifetime productivity of maltreatment victims (Daro, 1988).

It is well documented that children who have been abused or neglected are more likely to experience adverse outcomes throughout their life span in a number of areas:

- Poor physical health (e.g., chronic fatigue, altered immune function, hypertension, sexually transmitted diseases, obesity);
- Poor emotional and mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and attempts, post-traumatic stress disorder);
- Social difficulties (e.g., insecure attachments with caregivers, which may lead to difficulties in developing trusting relationships with peers and adults later in life);
- Cognitive dysfunction (e.g., deficits in attention, abstract reasoning, language development, and problem-solving skills, which ultimately affect academic achievement and school performance);
- High-risk health behaviors (e.g., a higher number of lifetime sexual partners, younger age at first voluntary intercourse, teen pregnancy, alcohol and substance abuse); and
- Behavioral problems (e.g., aggression, juvenile delinquency, adult criminality, abusive or violent behavior) (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006; Goldman, Salus, Wolcott, & Kennedy, 2003; Hagele, 2005).

The costs of responding to the impact of child abuse and neglect are borne by the victims and their families but also by society. This brief updates an earlier publication documenting the nationwide costs as a result of child abuse and neglect (Fromm, 2001). Similar to the earlier document, this brief places costs in two categories: direct costs, that is,

those costs associated with the immediate needs of children who are abused or neglected; and indirect costs, that is, those costs associated with the long-term and/or secondary effects of child abuse and neglect. All estimated costs are presented in 2007 dollars. Adjustments for inflation have been conducted using the price indexes for gross domestic product published by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (<http://www.bea.gov>).

Based on data drawn from a variety of sources, the estimated annual cost of child abuse and neglect is **\$103.8 billion** in 2007 value. This figure represents a conservative estimate as a result of the methods used for the calculation. First, only children who could be classified as being abused or neglected according to the Harm Standard in the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3) are included in the analysis. The Harm Standard requirements, compared to the Endangerment Standard requirements used in NIS-3, are more stringent (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996). Second, only those costs related to victims are included. We have not attempted to quantify other costs associated with abuse and neglect, such as the costs of intervention or treatment services for the perpetrators or other members of the victim's family. Third, the categories of costs included in this analysis are by no means exhaustive. As examples, a large number of child victims require medical examinations or outpatient treatment for injuries not serious enough to require hospitalization; maltreated children are at greater risk of engaging in substance abuse and require alcohol and drug treatment services; and youth with histories of child abuse and neglect may be at greater risk of engaging in risky behaviors such as unprotected sexual activities as well as greater risk of teen pregnancy. We were not able to estimate these types of costs as data are not readily available.

Although the economic costs associated with child abuse and neglect are substantial, it is essential to recognize that it is impossible to calculate the impact of the pain, suffering, and reduced quality of life that victims of child abuse and neglect experience. These "intangible losses", though difficult to quantify in monetary terms, are real and should not be overlooked. Intangible losses, in fact, may represent the largest cost component of violence against children and should be taken into account when allocating resources (Miller, 1993).

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DIRECT COSTS

Direct Costs	Estimated Annual Cost (in 2007 dollars)
Hospitalization <i>Rationale: 565,000 maltreated children suffered serious injuries in 1993¹. Assume that 50% of seriously injured victims require hospitalization². The average cost of treating one hospitalized victim of abuse and neglect was \$19,266 in 1999³. Calculation: $565,000 \times 0.50 \times \\$19,266 = \\$5,442,645,000$</i>	\$6,625,959,263
Mental Health Care System <i>Rationale: 25% to 50% of child maltreatment victims need some form of mental health treatment⁴. For a conservative estimate, 25% is used. Mental health care cost per victim by type of maltreatment is: physical abuse (\$2,700); sexual abuse (\$5,800); emotional abuse (\$2,700) and educational neglect (\$910)⁴. Cross referenced against NIS-3 statistics on number of each incident occurring in 1993¹. Calculations: Physical Abuse – $381,700 \times 0.25 \times \\$2,700 = \\$257,647,500$; Sexual Abuse – $217,700 \times 0.25 \times \\$5,800 = \\$315,665,000$; Emotional Abuse – $204,500 \times 0.25 \times \\$2,700 = \\$138,037,500$; and Educational Neglect – $397,300 \times 0.25 \times \\$910 = \\$90,385,750$; Total = \$801,735,750.</i>	\$1,080,706,049
Child Welfare Services System <i>Rationale: The Urban Institute conducted a study estimating the child welfare expenditures associated with child abuse and neglect by state and local public child welfare agencies to be \$23.3 billion in 2004⁵.</i>	\$25,361,329,051
Law Enforcement <i>Rationale: The National Institute of Justice estimated the following costs of police services for each of the following interventions: physical abuse (\$20); sexual abuse (\$56); emotional abuse (\$20) and educational neglect (\$2)⁴. Cross referenced against NIS-3 statistics on number of each incident occurring in 1993¹. Calculations: Physical Abuse – $381,700 \times \\$20 = \\$7,634,000$; Sexual Abuse – $217,700 \times \\$56 = \\$12,191,200$; Emotional Abuse – $204,500 \times \\$20 = \\$4,090,000$; and Educational Neglect – $397,300 \times \\$2 = \\$794,600$; Total = \$24,709,800</i>	\$33,307,770
Total Direct Costs	\$33,101,302,133

¹ Sedlak, A.J., & Broadhurst, D.D. (1996). *The third national incidence study of child abuse and neglect (NIS-3)*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC.

² Daro, D. (1988). *Confronting child abuse: Research for effective program design*. New York: Free Press.

³ Rovi, S., Chen, P.H., & Johnson, M.S. (2004). The economic burden of hospitalizations associated with child abuse and neglect. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94, 586-590. Retrieved September 7, 2007 from <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/reprint/94/4/586?ck=nck>

⁴ Miller, T.R., Cohen, M.A., & Wiersema, B. (1996) *Victim costs and consequences: A new look*. The National Institute of Justice. Retrieved August 27, 2007 from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/victcost.pdf>

⁵ Scarcella, C.A., Bess, R., Zielewski, E.H., & Geen, R. (2006). *The cost of protecting vulnerable children V: Understanding state variation in child welfare financing*. The Urban Institute. Retrieved August 27, 2007 from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311314_vulnerable_children.pdf

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INDIRECT COSTS

Indirect Costs	Estimated Annual Cost (in 2007 dollars)
Special Education <i>Rationale: 1,553,800 children experienced some form of maltreatment in 1993¹. 22% of maltreated children have learning disorders requiring special education⁶. The additional expenditure attributable to special education services for students with disabilities was \$5,918 per pupil in 2000⁷. Calculation: $1,553,800 \times 0.22 \times \\$5,918 = \\$2,022,985,448$</i>	\$2,410,306,242
Juvenile Delinquency <i>Rationale: 1,553,800 children experienced some form of maltreatment in 1993¹. 27% of children who are abused or neglected become delinquents, compared to 17% of children in the general population⁸, for a difference of 10%. The annual cost of caring for a juvenile offender in a residential facility was \$30,450 in 1989⁹. Calculation: $1,553,800 \times 0.10 \times \\$30,450 = \\$4,731,321,000$</i>	\$7,174,814,134
Mental Health and Health Care <i>Rationale: 1,553,800 children experienced some form of maltreatment in 1993¹. 30% of maltreated children suffer chronic health problems⁵. Increased mental health and health care costs for women with a history of childhood abuse and neglect, compared to women without childhood maltreatment histories, were estimated to be \$8,175,816 for a population of 163,844 women, of whom 42.8% experienced childhood abuse and neglect¹⁰. This is equivalent to \$117 [$\\$8,175,816 / (163,844 \times 0.428)$] additional health care costs associated with child maltreatment per woman per year. Assume that the additional health care costs attributable to childhood maltreatment are similar for men who experienced maltreatment as a child. Calculation: $1,553,800 \times 0.30 \times \\$117 = \\$54,346,699$</i>	\$67,863,457
Adult Criminal Justice System <i>Rationale: The direct expenditure for operating the nation's criminal justice system (including police protection, judicial and legal services, and corrections) was \$204,136,015,000 in 2005¹¹. According to the National Institute of Justice, 13% of all violence can be linked to earlier child maltreatment⁴. Calculations: $\\$204,136,015,000 \times 0.13 = \\$26,537,681,950$</i>	\$27,979,811,982
Lost Productivity to Society <i>Rationale: The median annual earning for a full-time worker was \$33,634 in 2006¹². Assume that only children who suffer serious injuries due to maltreatment (565,000¹) experience losses in potential lifetime earnings and that such impairments are limited to 5% of the child's total potential earnings². The average length of participation in the labor force is 39.1 years for men and 29.3 years for women¹³; the overall average 34 years is used. Calculation: $\\$33,634 \times 565,000 \times 0.05 \times 34 = \\$32,305,457,000$</i>	\$33,019,919,544
Total Indirect Costs	\$70,652,715,359
TOTAL COST	\$ 103,754,017,492

⁶ Hammerle, N. (1992). *Private choices, social costs, and public policy: An economic analysis of public health issues*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, Praeger.

⁷ Chambers, J.G., Parrish, T.B., & Harr, J.J. (2004). *What are we spending on special education services in the United States, 1999-2000?* Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved August 28, 2007 from <http://www.csef-air.org/publications/seep/national/AdvRpt1.PDF>

⁸ Widom, C.S., & Maxfield, M.G. (2001). *An update on the "cycle of violence"*. U.S. Department of Justice, the National Institute of Justice. Retrieved August 27, 2007 from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/184894.pdf>

⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census (1993). *Statistical abstract of the United States, 1993* (113th edition.) Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. Retrieved September 6, 2007 from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/1993-03.pdf>

¹⁰ Walker, E.A., Unutzer, J., Rutter, C., Gelfand, A., Saunders, K., VonKorff, M., Koss, M., & Katon, W. (1999). Costs of health care use by women HMO members with a history of childhood abuse and neglect. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 56, 609-613. Retrieved August 22, 2007 from <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/56/7/609?ck=nck>

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¹² U.S. Department of Labor (2007). *National compensation survey: Occupational wages in the United States, June 2006*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved September 4, 2007 from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ocs/sp/ncbl0910.pdf>

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